

Marc Järvinen

HUMOR AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

A case of a Finnish e-retailer

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Marc Järvinen
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ABSTRACT

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Author: Marc Järvinen

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This research work has been conducted for Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OUAS) for bachelor's thesis project. Commissioner is from inside OUAS concern called Verkkokaupan tutkimusryhmä. The topic of humor was chosen in order to broaden the understanding and appreciation towards humor in marketing communications. The views, mechanics, and politics of humor interest the author and thus the research project was born. Humor is a powerful tool in everyday life and conceals great potential utility in marketing communications of which this research project is aiming to answer.

In short, the outlining research questions are how humor could be utilized in benefit of the company's marketing communications and what affects the quality of humor. The research is carried out by using various examples and notes in order to create a guidebook-like work for better understanding of humor in marketing communications. In order to reinforce the findings from the research, a small scale survey has been conducted in Oulu University of Applied Sciences. The survey included two multicultural groups of students and one Finnish group; in total of 52 respondents. Due to the small database no real conclusions should be made from the data represented, but the findings should allow greater understanding characteristics of humor and should work as a preliminary research of the topic.

Humor and humor usage in company's marketing communications is a complex tool. There are multiple considerations when attempting humor in any given case. According to this research humor has a lot of potential to benefit companies if the humor is represented accordingly. The research work follows through from theory to practice with case example analysis. The case example is made from Finnish army equipment retailer Varusteleka, using applied four P's model. Varusteleka is known for use of wit and humor in their marketing communications.

Keywords: Humor, marketing, case, example, research, work

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1 INTRODUCTION

This research is directed for companies interested in utilizing humor as a marketing communications tool. The research should provide valuable information for companies interested in applying humor in their marketing communications, ultimately encouraging and helping the firm to identify the possibility of humor and to understand the power of humor in marketing communications. Humor may play strong emphasis on firm's branding and help the company to acquire more market share, thus creating stronger brand identity. The theoretical framework will be implemented in to a case company example as the reader reads through this research.

Humor has a number of positive psychological factors to an individual that may be applied in to business concepts in a way, in which the firm conducting such activity may enjoy various benefits; such as earlier mentioned stronger brand identity. Humor may be risky investment and should be approached cautiously in any given scenario. Nevertheless, if humor is applied appropriately, it might benefit the company greatly. Any firm in any given market can utilize humor in their marketing communications, but not many choose to do it. This research will consider the use of humor in marketing from both the customer's and the company's point of view. Emphasis in this research relies on company's perspective.

The research will follow through the potential, limitations and efficiency of humor as well as how humor could be applied accordingly. This research emphasis on how humor may be used as a differentiation tactic and to increase virality (e.g. Word-of-Mouth) in order to gain competitive advantage over rivals in a market. Applied marketing mix and global approach to humor will also be covered at the end of this research. The research consists of theoretical framework and theory applied in to case example analysis.

A number of examples will be used in order to demonstrate the points mentioned in theoretical framework. Further analysis and speculation will be discussed in the case example analysis. The work will follow practical examples throughout the chapters from the case example company to illustrate how the theory works in real life. In addition, a survey study will be implemented in to this research in order to gather information on how humor is perceived and the effects in an individual consumer. This is done in order to fully understand how cultural differences affect humor in global marketing communications. The survey was directed for multicultural group of 18-24 year old business students. Due to the lack of material on the subject the theoretical framework will be followed through with research of basic marketing principals and carefully considered ideas on how humor may be applied in such situation. Appropriate resources will be used anywhere possible.

The case company is Finnish military equipment e-retailer: Varusteleka. A number of examples will revolve around Varusteleka in order for the reader to gain greater insight of the company before introducing Varusteleka in the empirical part of this research. In 2010 Varusteleka achieved the leading position of military equipment retailer in EU (data collected from Varusteleka homepages). Varusteleka mainly operates in Finnish markets and is competing with five million people market compared to other similar retailers operating in Europe with much larger markets. Varusteleka's emphasis is on the quality of the products as well as clever usage of humor in their marketing communications, Varusteleka is most known for their wit and humor in their communications. The research will attempt to answer how Varusteleka has been so successful in their vision with using humor. Varusteleka operates in Helsinki and they have their walk-in shop there, most of the transactions are made virtually in Varusteleka website. Varusteleka accepts international orders as well, but their main interest relies in Finnish markets (Varusteleka home pages).

In short, this research aims to promote the power of humor in one's marketing communications. The vision is to create guide-book like research work, whereas the reader learns from theory to practice using several examples, ultimately illustrating how humor has been implemented successfully in to e-retail company as a case example.

This research will try to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspects have to be taken in to account when using humor in marketing communications
2. How humor can be utilized in benefit of the company's marketing communications

The survey has been conducted to multicultural group of students in order to gain greater knowledge how a person from different backgrounds perceives humor. Case example data has been mainly collected from Varusteleka webpages and correlated to the outcomes from this research. Finally, Varusteleka case analysis is carried out by using applied four P's paradigm.

2 ASPECTS OF HUMOR

In order to start using humor as a marketing communications strategy, we need to identify what is considered humoristic or funny. This chapter attempts to define humor as in what is humor and how does it function in business operations, as well as how maximum impact with humor can be achieved. A number of aspects in the use of humor will be considered from both domestic and international point of view. The goal is to understand the core phenomenon behind humor in marketing communications. This report attempts to identify the possible pitfalls and rewards from approaching marketing communications with the use of humor, ultimately learning how to exploit humor's unique characteristics in business operations.

2.1 Definition of humor

The challenge defining humor is that how we perceive humor is highly diverse among different people, moreover even more diverse world-wide. There are several unique types of humor, which all may be used appropriately in various different contexts; all of which with the aim of provoking laughter or amusement from the object (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006)

In order to give a simple explanation: humor can be defined as the aspiration of provoking laughter and provide amusement from expressions intended to arouse amusement. "The response of laughter is based on two general situations. Humor either plays a trick on the mind or it paints a picture which is ludicrous or incongruous" (Audreith, 1998). There are number of ways to amuse the audience by appropriately inserting humoristic expressions, to name a few humor can be applied in number of ways, such as: narrative jokes, nonsensical slapstick, irony, and sarcasm (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008).

According to Taina Vuorela humor is used in all of cultures. Humor is frequently context-specific, which may prove to be difficult to translate into another language. Vuorela claims that humor is based on cultural inside knowledge and humor's use also reinforces the feelings of togetherness of a group. If this is performed appropriately the customer base may feel solidarity in between the customers and the company itself. For example: a circle of friends have their own set of sense of humor which they apply appropriately depending on the context, that may differ greatly from what others perceive as humoristic or funny. The same principle could be applied to sense of humor in different cultures, e.g. a group of people sharing similar beliefs, customs and values. Humor may prove to be very difficult task for international businesses to transfer the humoristic references in to another language or culture successfully. In order for businesses to conduct this successfully, the company needs to research the target culture and language beforehand conducting such reference in order to truly succeed.

2.2 Effects of humor

Bergeron and Vachon claim that humor is known to be a powerful stress reliever. It has been proven that humor can impact positively on a person's physical, psychological well-being as well as feelings of hope (Vuorela, 2005). The positive image via the use of humor can be related to trust created via the good feeling they generate in a person. Humor (feelings of hope) decreases stress in a person, thus they may feel less anxious and perceive lesser amount of risk in their purchase, ultimately, leading to a purchase decision which they would not normally do in a given situation; this may greatly decrease the barriers to purchase in e-retail websites.

Consumer perceived risk is recognized as a factor that influences consumer behavior greatly, whereas the customer may be wary of the uncertainty of the exchange, thus delaying or even withdrawing the purchase intention with the intention to go shop around (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008). The advantage increases in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance index (Hofstede, 2001).

As claimed before, humor has been shown to work also as a great stress reliever in form of laughter. E.g. humor makes us feel good (Vuorela, 2005), whereas humor is great in order to diffuse tension (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008).

From a psychological perspective positive feelings can be associated to one and another from external influences, i.e. customers associate the company with the good feelings they receive through laughter. The company could establish stronger market position via the use of humor as a marketing communications tool. Humor and feelings of well-being can also create an emotional involvement between the parties, encouraging the sense of solidarity in between (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008).

According to Barbara Plester 2009, a few studies suggest that humor and fun may be connected to improved performance and job satisfaction. Plester also suggests that the use of humor in workplace may improve employee engagement at work. Bergeron and Vachon also suggest that humor used in self-deprecation manner may function as most effective tool for leaders and CEOs in order to gain trust and credibility among the workers.

2.3 Segmentation similarity

The use of humor is very complex and highly contextual and is needed to be conducted precisely depending on the situation. There can be various scenarios where humor is not applied appropriately, thus failing to reach the object in humorous manner. "Whether or not something is humorous depends on numerous factors, not the least of which is the nature of the audience" (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006).

What is perceived as funny to object of one's culture may not be humoristic in another culture or group of people. Additionally how humor is perceived can vary from number of factors, such as by: gender, education level, age groups and cultures. It is vital for a company to identify and understand the company's core segment group before using humor as a marketing communications tool; in

order to deliver a successful joke as marketing communication tactic. Segmentation is vital part of any business to identify and utilize data received. When the companies know exactly who, when and why customers wish to purchase their products they can apply various marketing communication tactics to increase their sales. The relevance to humor in segmenting one's customers may be that the company is able to identify and establish commonalities with its customers; i.e. when the agent, the object of the humor and the audience share commonality in between; the humor is most likely to succeed (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006).

Companies trying to implement humor successfully in to their marketing campaigns have to adapt their marketing methods for different markets. Every market has a segment, every segment has a variety of customer tastes and trends, and every trend has an individual behind it; that being said possibilities are many and one should be careful when planning their marketing campaign. A well-established commonality segment may work in favor in creating strong sense of solidarity and belonging, for example: Varusteleka knows that their main customer base consists of males; they may choose to use highly masculine type of humor in order to create bigger impact in their target audience. This may lead to Varusteleka voluntarily leaving a segment out of their customer base, but creating a stronger link with more dominant part of the market segment. Doing so is not necessary, since a softer way of delivering humor to the target group may be considered in order to appeal to the audience group more cautiously. Delivery and setting up the target audience may be manipulated to facture desired outcome. Varusteleka might choose to include both males and females as their target audience with the cost of its initial impact or effectiveness.

Humor is not only dependent on the joke itself, but also the interaction between the joke, joker and the audience. "A joke may be humorous from one source and highly offensive from another" (Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger, March G, 2006). They also suggest that humor victimizing the opposing party, in for example gender roles, and correlate in to much more favorable outcome from the target audience. The more intense negative disposition is placed on the

opposing party the greater the scale of humoristic response is received from the target group.

Negative disposition should be used carefully, because the affected secondary party will most likely be offended. In a case of strong, dominant segment group such as for example males versus females the outcome could outweigh the negative impact. Much of appreciation towards humor may be a result of execution, rather than the joke itself. What is perceived funny may be the result of complex calculation of who the agent of the joke and how is it presented to which audience, no matter how funny the joke is, if the execution lacks the humoristic value may be deemed to fail or even perceived as offensive right from the start (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006). For Varusteleka the common interest military and military equipment creates great commonality for already existing and potential customers. After well-established commonality humor may be applied in correct manner and proportions, this has thus far worked greatly in favor of Varusteleka as an effective mean in marketing communications. I.e. deliver military-like jokes to military-like persons.

2.4 Efficiency and opportunities

The true potential of humor relies on its authenticity. Those who succeed to differentiate themselves from the mass usually get additional benefits to their name. This is no different from your everyday life or one's business game. If humor is applied correctly in right proportions, this may very well prove to be your effective mean of differentiation tactic and strong connection to your customers. Humor is efficient tool in influencing person's perception and understanding, moreover humor may be utilized in a number of ways, one of which to influence and persuade people in addition to what has been mentioned earlier. According to Bergeron and Vachon, humor increases the person's credibility, which may be linked to feelings of trust. A person who uses humor demonstrates a sense of humanity, friendliness and benevolence.

Humor may generate authenticity of the brand image; this could potentially create credible perception of authenticity and lets you be seen as more personal when companies approach their customer base. The business enjoys the closer connection between the customer and the company, thus trust between the two parties may evolve and customer loyalty comes in place.

“Humor’s ability to elicit positive emotions also has a positive correlation to trust, which is a common issue for e-commerce websites” (Mallikarjunan, 2011). The company may gain more positive feedback from the customers and word-of-mouth can arise when customers tell about their positive experiences to their close circle, thus gaining free marketing communications through the use of humor. In addition, as suggested by Sylvie Jean, 2011 humor and humoristic brand image can be used as leverage against competing brands as well. Sylvie suggests that marketing campaigns called brand parodies can be used as a mean of deliberately mocking competing companies via marketing communications. According to Sylvie’s findings using brand parody as a mean of marketing communications is generally accepted in consumers and proved to be a working method in demeaning competitor’s brand image, and thus improving your market credibility. One famous example in brand parody style advertising was held between Audi and BMW, where Audi deliberately challenged BMW with their new car model.



FIGURE 1 Chess game between Audi and BMW in brand parody style advertising

([http://adsoftheworld.com/media/outdoor/bmw_checkmate?size= original](http://adsoftheworld.com/media/outdoor/bmw_checkmate?size=original))

In the figure above Audi launched a billboard marketing campaign on the left, deliberately mocking and challenging BMW with their new car brand. On the right you can see the response from BMW, which was placed in the same location as Audi's billboard. The response from BMW marketing campaign effectively diminished the impact from Audi's original brand parody and, in fact, gained an upper hand in the battle of brand parodies effectively saying "we won".

In order to quote Gulas, Charles Weinberger and March again "appreciation should be maximal when our friends humiliate our enemies, and minimal when our enemies manage to get the upper hand over our friends." This marketing campaign should have bigger impact on fans of BMW than ordinary advertisement, since they managed to get an upper hand on Audi's original brand parody billboard.

The use of humor may also be used in order to negate negative effects of errors. E-commerce operating solely on internet is bound to have loopholes and misfits in the coding, which may result in failure of the software, giving the customer the obnoxious error message. Humor used in such error code series can help to diffuse the frustration of the negative experience of receiving an error (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008).

Whenever user receives an error in YouTube, a video streaming website, the error does not simply say "404 video not found". Instead, YouTube announces that: "a team of highly trained monkeys has been dispatched to deal with this situation" and gives all the relevant information. Hopefully this will help to negate the displeasure of receiving an error, and rather than being frustrated, generates amusement as a response from the customer. In a difficult situation such as this, humor may influence positively the salesperson's empathy, hopefully diminishing or diffusing any negative response (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008).

Humor also can be relatively easy to produce and highly cost effective mean of promoting one's company or goods and creating a viable brand image. All humor needs is a sense of humor and the know-how; all the rest is just potential work hours and plan to implement it correctly in order to reach the customer accordingly. Although that being said humor is a two-bladed sword; people may laugh at the jokes but forget the product telling it (Fugate, 1998). The amount of humor is highly difficult to measure, but properly maintained it may prove to yield high returns.

2.5 Limitations and risks

When companies willingly take risks they expect to have something gain from it. The bigger the risk the bigger the expected return. Same principle can be applied in humor as well.

“... in the case of a failed attempt at humor, the advertisers will pay a price” (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006). Consumers can be very sensitive and humor should be used cautiously. Humor may establish boundaries in work environment and in business operations (Plester, 2009), such as the nature of the jokes may divide the audience according to their gender, age, culture, educational level and ethnicity (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006). There are number of factors which may affect the use of humor, and it should be stressed that it is important to understand the target group of the company. Without the knowledge the company is deemed to fail, with or without the use of humor. The appreciation towards certain types of humor comes from factors outlined above, for example for subtle satire humor generally requires some level of intelligence from the audience (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006).

Highly masculine type of humor may appear to the female audience group as such that they feel the pressure to belong, oppose or left outside from the commonality group. The quality of humor can be found offensive to those who do not belong to the target audience, leaving the effectiveness of humor questionable as it may work as a restricting factor (Plester, 2009). According to

Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger and March G it has been found by advertising practitioners that humorous advertisement had greater impact for younger target audiences, whereas slang plays important role in humor perception.

Probably the most important aspect in humor as a marketing communications is to deliver the right joke to the right audience, e.g. to find the correct commonality group. Humor has a lot of potential when used in correct context, but if directed to wrong audience it may generate extremely negative response from the consumers. Humor takes a lot of planning in order to be executed properly, and risks and rewards should be equally considered. It may be difficult to define where to draw the line for the use of humor, the business conducting such business should be aware of the boundaries involved when using humor in their marketing communications (Plester, 2009). Humor is most effective when the company have identified their target audience's intelligence, age, preferences and gender. There can be slight differences among different demographics on how humor is perceived, thus having an impact on how the humor should be represented (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006).

Humor misused may reduce credibility, decrease trust, distort the communication of key information and even establish barriers between each party (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008). Nevertheless, it is safe to say that there are more benefits to humor than negativities. Disadvantages may be countered with clever planning and implementation of company's marketing communications, such as everything else in business environment. Humor is not suitable in every situation. According to Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger and March G. 2006 humor in specific situation has lower degree of impact and even harmful effect than in certain segments of the market. The humor in context may be perceived as taboo, meaning that the use of jokes and laughter is not generally associated with offered services; such services can be funeral services for example.

2.6 Culture and humor

“A group has a culture when it has enough shared history to have formed a set of basic assumptions which guide behavior, perception, thoughts and feelings.”

– Barbara Plester, 2009. Plester claims that humor in a culture can clarify the social and moral boundaries of the group that define acceptable behavior in a group of people. Humor is a complex tool in business environment and the effects of humor may be utilized in a number of ways. Humor can be used to define sense of belonging in to one’s group or culture and improve one’s sense of identity (Plester, 2009).

In short, humor can be also used as a measurement tool along with many benefits it brings forth in a business environment. Global appreciation to humor varies highly, but since there are so many variables given in global perspective there is bound to be similarities in between. According to Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger and March G, 2006 a study has shown that Finnish and American college student’s respond in a similar way to humorous advertising. This may suggest that Finnish and American college students may have similar humorous preferences, and in theory may the same joke may work as effective in both nations. Although Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger and March G, 2006 also pose that jokes may not be easily translatable between languages.

According to Dana L. Alden, Wayne D. Hoyer, & Chol Lee several scholars has concluded that humor is in fact universal and incongruity type of humor is being the central focus. There is no culture with no sense of humor, thus in theory, humor can be applied in every corner of the world. In order to be sure of the quality of the humor one has to recognize the cultural pattern inside a nation. Some cultures may appreciate expected outcome versus unexpected outcome of a joke more than others for example. Humor should not be implemented generally in any form if the target audience is unknown or the consequences can be serious (Alden;Hoyer;& Lee, 1993).

In global advertising it gets trickier. In global advertising you add significantly more people as your target audience, thus increasing the chance of failure and possibly decreasing the overall effectiveness of the humor itself. The bigger the audience base the bigger challenge it is to segment the audience. The more audience you have, the more likely the humor will not reach out to everybody. The company's objective should be to acquire more than what they lose for picking a greater audience base. The company should figure out the maximum capacity of the humor, i.e how many people on average will understand the joke and the impact of the joke. Implement it appropriately to designed cultures and hope for the best.

What the business needs to do is to identify specific types of contrasts, such as earlier mentioned expected/unexpected paradigm. When or if these contrasts can be identified the communication method may be somewhat standardized. The more you are able to standardize a joke the bigger will be the success rate. (Alden;Hoyer;& Lee, 1993). Once you are able to standardize the advertisement in to a reasonable "one size fit all" kind of package you can deliver the correct message to the correct audience more clearly, hopefully creating better results. On the other hand according to Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger and March G. 2006 claims that there is no one-size-fits-all model in humor, but humor may be implemented in such manner that it comes close to standardized package, but customized specifically to a group of certain humoristic preferences.

According to Dana L. Alden, Wayne D. Hoyer, & Chol Lee an important goal of advertising is to bring the cultural world and the good together in a "special harmony." The difficulty is to add humor in right proportions in to the mix to create a successful, informative, and funny commercial. Hofstede, 2001 found that national cultures could be separated on basis of several dimensions. According to Hofstede there are six unique dimensions of a culture which can distinguish a culture from another. The dimensions include the following; Power distance index (PDI), individualism versus collectivism (IDV), masculinity versus femininity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), long-term versus short-term orientation (LTO), indulgence versus restraint (IVR) (Hofstede, 2001).

These dimensions can be utilized accordingly to create a greater understanding of a culture the company is planning to communicate with and help to create incongruity in between. Offensive humor may have bigger impact in low uncertainty avoidance cultures than in high uncertainty avoidance cultures (Hatzithomas;Zotos;& Boutsouki, 2011), and (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006). For example, we can browse one of Hofstede's dimensions: individualism vs. collectivism. According to Hofstede it can be recognized that China is highly collectivistic country, which grants us valuable information that this contrast could be indeed used as a helpful tool to help the company's marketing communications with incongruous humor. Further on, when the communication is meant to reach out to more countries internationally, the company could compare the said countries and create an average of the values collected. This enables the company, as earlier discussed, to help in the progress of creating the message in more standardized fashion as well as helping to create the style of the joke. The cultural data can also be utilized to gain greater understanding of the culture in various ways (Hatzithomas;Zotos;& Boutsouki, 2011).

3 HUMOR IN MARKETING

In the chapter below will be revised how companies can alter their brand image with the use of humor. Especially for web based companies it may prove very difficult to reach out for the potential customer and create viable relations with their customer base. This chapter will try to answer the research question on how humor can be utilized in benefit of the company's marketing communications.

3.1 Differentiation

Brands are identified as the most valuable assets to a company and with clever brand management may be the key aspect for a company. Branding can be used as multi-purpose tool in business environment and the best part is that a brand can be what you make of it. Different branding strategies involve separating the company from the market segment and creating image of being superior to your competitors (Backhaus & Surinder, 2004).

Humor has been recognized to influence the consumer's ability to recall a brand image more clearly. Humor in advertisements helps the customers remember the company's marketing communications and possibly the company itself. This may help the companies to convey their message more efficiently to the audience and increase the efficiency of their marketing communications plan (Gao, 2011). In addition, once the brand has been successfully differentiated as humoristic the value of the humor reflected to branding heightens over time. The consumers may implement the past experience in to present. I.e. consumers implement the image of being funny prior seeing the advertisement, thus setting a mindset for themselves ultimately seeing the advertisement funnier than it actually is.

Positive brand attitude enables to utilize humor as a more effective persuasion tactic and positively effects brand evaluation. Humor creates more positive

effect on the audience in regard to direct persuasion (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006) and (Jean, 2011). As suggested by Gulas, Charles S. Weinberger, March G, 2006 only certain types of persons seek out external humor, e.g. receiving humor. Using wit and humor may enable the company to attract such target group, which could increase the likeliness the customers come to their website in order to receive humor. Humor involves the motivation to process humor and active involvement in order to have the maximum effect, which is desired effect from company's communication strategy.

E-retailers, such as Varusteleka, may be seen as "faceless" organizations to consumers. Companies solely operating in e-retail may experience difficulties reaching out for the customer, because the face-to-face customer service does not simply exist. Humor enables the company to arouse emotions in the customers and is able to communicate with customers in a way, which normally would be impossible to E-retailers. Arousing positive emotions in customers is vital for any company in order to create more credible image of the business and recognition (Gulas;Charles;Weinberger;& March, 2006).

E-retail based organizations may experience such problems and the only viable mean to differentiate their business strategy is through product diversity, quality or pricing. Differentiation tactic in this case relies solely on the attributes of the products itself and may be costly. Humor can be utilized in e-retail in order to differentiate the company amongst the crowd with little to no expense, taken the degree in which the company wishes to establish themselves. The company could establish more personal appeal to consumers via the use of humor; reaching out more to the emotional aspect of selling. Humor may work as an emotional link between the company and the consumer.

A strong brand identity in a market may increase word-of-mouth, which essentially is free advertisement for the company. Word-of-mouth is the advertisement value received from two external parties of the company about the brand or products, i.e. two consumers sharing a funny commercial in social media. Word-of-mouth is the ultimate way of advertising, since it does not

require any effort from company's behalf and it is recognized to be more effective mean of advertising.

3.2 Humor in consumer purchasing process

There are five distinguished buying roles in a consumer purchasing process including; initiator, influencer, decider, buyer and consumer. The purpose of this topic is to focus each role and evaluate how humor can be used to influence the total customer value the customer may perceive when making the purchase decision. "Total customer value is the perceived monetary value of the bundle of economic, functional, and psychological benefits customers expect from a given market offering" (Kotler, 2003). Customers evaluate the perceived product value by the main characteristics of the given product. For example: the perceived reliability, durability, performance and resale value. Humor may create monetary value to the products via the psychological benefits humor generates in customers. Humor could potentially create a price premium for the product without adding any more actual additional benefits to the product. This may prove a highly cost effective mean to raise the perceived monetary value of the company's products. The customer will buy the product from whoever offers the most perceived monetary value to the customer. Humor should only be used as an addition to the total customer value, which may work favorably on behalf of the business who delivers psychological satisfaction, i.e. amusement.

There is a person suggesting an idea of buying the product or service from given market offering (Kotler, 2003). This is where humor may play its role and work as the initiator for customers. They may see something amusing in the web pages and let their friends know about it, which then proceeds to gather information about the company and its products; and could potentially lead to purchase decisions. The initiator can also be the company itself, as demonstrated in chapter 2.

The influences are the set of views, advices and perceived value the customer evaluates before making purchase decision or have acquired from someone else (Kotler, 2003). This is where the heightened perceived value and views help the consumer to make his or her purchase decision. If the brand image of the company is successfully established in the market, it may work as a strong influencer, ultimately persuading the customer to make the purchase decision.

The person who decides on the characteristics of the purchase is the decider; whether to buy, what to buy, how to buy, or where to buy (Kotler, 2003). The decider for the purchase could be for example one's boss, anyone who has the ultimate decision making power and final say on the purchase process. Decider may be influenced, like anyone else in the target group, by promotion of the company's products/brand. Decider goes through the possible benefits they can acquire through the purchase compared to others, i.e. total customer value. As outlined, humor may create more positive image of the products or the company for the decider and work as an external influencer for the decider.

The person who makes the actual purchase is called the buyer (Kotler, 2003). This is where the buying decision process becomes tricky to influence with humor externally because the purchase decision might have been done beforehand already. The buyer may be influenced in form of after sales and customer relations. All of the above applied; the buyer is the person who physically goes in to make the purchase of the chosen goods or services, he or she may or may not have the power to make additional decisions regarding the purchase. The buyer may be influenced by persuasive communication and in order to build up lasting customer relations with the buyer and the organization they represent. In this case, where the seller and the purchaser are in face-to-face negotiation situation, it is vital for the seller to "sell themselves" before any agreeable solutions may be found. Negotiation atmosphere may be stressful and highly strict environment. Humor applied accordingly may ease up the tension and bring up a positive image of the seller and the seller's organization. This may help the company offering goods or services to deliver their message across more easily and generate customer loyalty, which furthermore would

help the company building up its brand image. Positive word-of-mouth may occur.

When the customer is prepared to make a purchase decision or attempting to shift towards of considering it, they may incorporate the perceived pleasantness of the service situation in to the service quality itself. Humor may work as a mean to add to the incorporated pleasantness shifted towards the end service. A salesperson using humor indicates signs of confidence and control. Humor may also be used as a tool of revealing information that would be normally impossible to uncover otherwise (Fugate, 1998).

The end user of the product or service, i.e. the person who consumes or uses the product or service that is being purchased is the final consumer of the product (Kotler, 2003). In this scenario, humor may be applied through the product or service itself. The product or the service may contain humorous references throughout the consumption of the good, thus generating higher perception of the good's actual worth. In service sector this may prove to be much easier since there humor can be applied in more obvious way. The customer is in face-to-face contact with the service provider where humor may be applied in numerous ways throughout the service period, thus the company is able to promote itself and improve their image.

Companies should demonstrate that they can serve the customer in much superior way than its rivals. This may play a vital role in building long-lasting customer relations. The sales force of a company thriving for building long-lasting customer relations must be ready to serve their customer in the best manner possible. Loyal customer base may be source of steady income for the company and secure possible future growth (Kotler, 2003).

“Most authors claim that someone who is perceived as having a good sense of humour is viewed as being competent, knowledgeable, happy, and socially confident” (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008). Humor in many cases can be perceived as gateway in pursuit of credible image as a salesperson. Building a competent

image in negotiations, whether it would be face-to-face or online, can help the representative in succeeding in the sale.

3.3 Word-of-Mouth

In previous chapters the possible risks and drawbacks have been evaluated thus far. It has been suggested that the use of humor requires the correct audience with the correct concept in order to succeed. In marketing communications, it is important to approach the customer appearing as personal as possible in order to promote more intimate marketing tactic. For example: the more personal the marketing campaign appears to the customers, the more intimate the brand image may seem; thus potentially resulting in greater customer interest and recognition. The best way may be to accomplish this is to get the customers talk about the company themselves.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) can be defined as the function of two or more external consumers exchanging thoughts, ideas or comments of the company. If the customer perceives that the company is performing efficiently they might mention about it to others alike, thus generating free marketing communications through the consumers itself without having to influence the activity themselves. WOM could be considered as an extension of successful business conduct. WOM is appreciated more than actual marketing communications from the company itself since the separate identity from the company has no self-interest in promoting the company (Bergeron & Vachon, 2008).

4 CASE ANALYSIS OF VARUSTELEKA

A study has been conducted in Oulu University of Applied Sciences with the purpose of gather larger understanding interpretation of humor and how students respond to Varusteleka marketing communications. The target group of this study is an international group of 18-24 year old business students. The students will be shown one of Varusteleka's marketing communication videos. The video is a parody of the movie Terminator; it mimics the actions of part of the movie in humoristic manner in an attempt to advertise Varusteleka. The students were given a grading scale of 1-5 for given answers. The findings and graphs are based on the 1-5 scale on average. (See video at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dubpdh4x1So>)

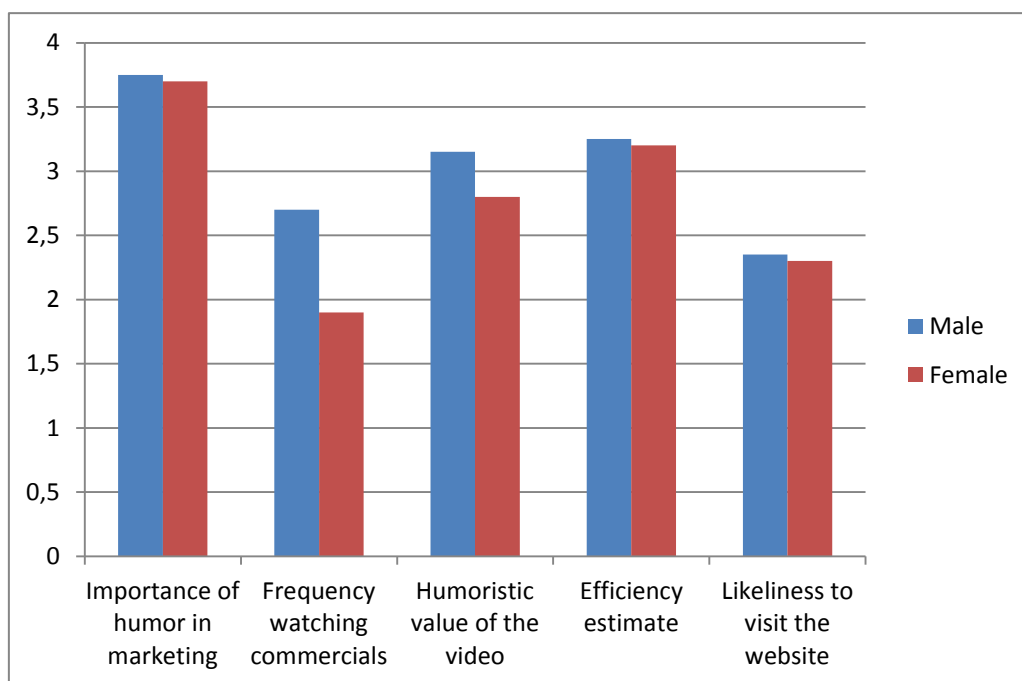
Further on the participants will be asked to fill out a survey of set questions; in order to gain greater understanding of the mechanics of humor in advertising. This should demonstrate the company how to plan out the use of humor in marketing communication more efficiently and identify the effects of humor in an individual consumer internationally. The questions presented are customized to meet the target group's intelligence about international business, hopefully resulting in more accurate estimation of results. The questionnaire will divide the target audience in following fashion: gender, home country, and intelligence about the company.

The data will be analyzed and measured to identify how different genders and cultures interpret humor, and how brand image might have worked as a factor in estimating the quality of the humor in the chosen video. The questionnaire can be found from appendix #1 at the end of this report. The results from open ended questions are not reported, but are accounted for when analyzing the results. This chapter will follow through the set of questions that were asked from the students after showing the video. The results of the specific questions will be reviewed and analyzed in order to create understanding of the audience point of view on humor. The survey was conducted in Oulu University of Applied

Sciences for two multicultural and one completely Finnish group of students. Multicultural respondents were chosen in order to include cultural variable in to the considerations. Following procedures include identifying the occurring phenomenon in segments outlined below. The questionnaire covered in total of 52 respondents. Most dominant proportion came from abroad, mostly Asian countries with total of 23 males and nine female recipients. Respondents from Finland consisted of 15 females and five males in total. It should be noted that due to the fluctuation between the recipients the data may be inconclusive, but the questionnaire may serve as assistance in further speculation and identifying the phenomena in the answers.

4.1 Gender roles

Above is a graph demonstrating the differences in given values based by gender.



GRAPH 1 Values given based on gender n=52

The values are the averages from given values from both Finnish and abroad respondents combined, this is done in order to identify the phenomena between gender roles excluding the cultural factors. It should be noted that cultural differences may affect the fluctuation of the responses and will be taken in consideration in this topic later on. The responses from same cultural backgrounds had slight differences from the combined values given.

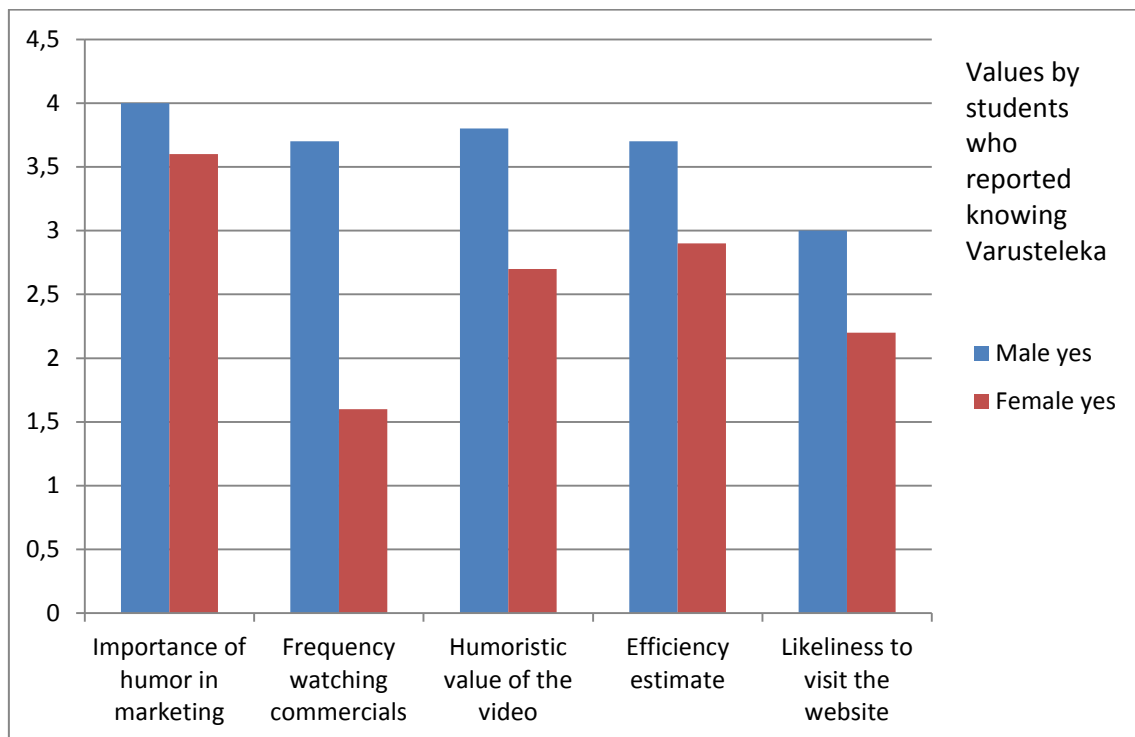
Based on the raw data received the gender roles had most prominent difference in the frequency the respondents were to watch funny commercials online. Males were more prone to watch funny commercials online than females. Other values, as can be seen from the graph, remained fairly constant and no other significant fluctuation between gender roles was identified.

Interestingly, when isolated to separate groups: Finnish and group called abroad the figures showed reverse fluctuation, which may be result of low amount of recipients from either gender and cannot be used in order to draw any final conclusions.

The most common response to the video shown from female audience was mostly negative in qualitative (open ended) questions. The findings show that the female audience straight up stated that they did not belong to the target group, or that they did not find the commercial humoristic or entertaining at all. It seems that the nature of the company or the video may have affected the outcome of the survey from female perspective. The female audience may have not felt like being part of the target group of the commercial, thus may have refused or failed to see the humoristic intentions of the commercial. Interestingly, the sense of not belonging to the group might have aroused negative responses from female audience. One of the female respondents reported the advertisement to be irritating.

Further on, a number of the respondents did not understand the nature of the video. Many of the respondents, both male and female, claimed copyright infringements and showed negative response to the commercial itself, effectively showing that such commercial could have been a failure outside of Finland. Several of the international students reported that in their respective

country a video posing a naked man would be seen as offensive and would most likely be banned from airing. Several of both male and female respondents reported failing to see the purpose of the video and what was being advertised. The reactions seemed to be confused and several respondents reported that the sunglasses which the man in the video was asking for was the purpose of the video. Ultimately a number of respondents thought that the company was advertising sunglasses. All of respondents who misinterpret the purpose of the video did not have prior knowledge of Varusteleka. It seems that knowledge of the company greatly affected the outcome of the replies. Above is graph showing the values given by students who reported to know Varusteleka prior the questionnaire.

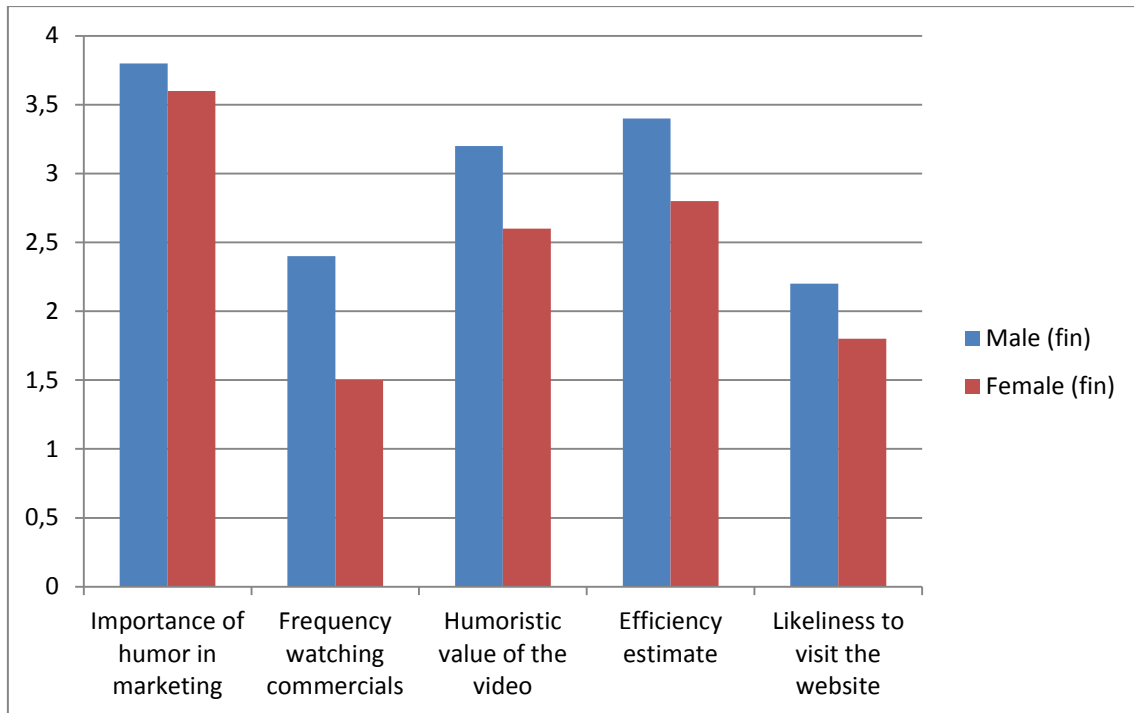


GRAPH 2 Answers based on prior knowledge of Varusteleka

This graph represents the male and female respondents combined who reported to know Varusteleka beforehand. Generally males seemed to be more open to the video than females. Overall, on the contrary to the previous statement, females who reported to know Varusteleka reported to watch commercials online significantly less than males. This may suggest that the male respondents, who knew Varusteleka beforehand, are more willing to seek

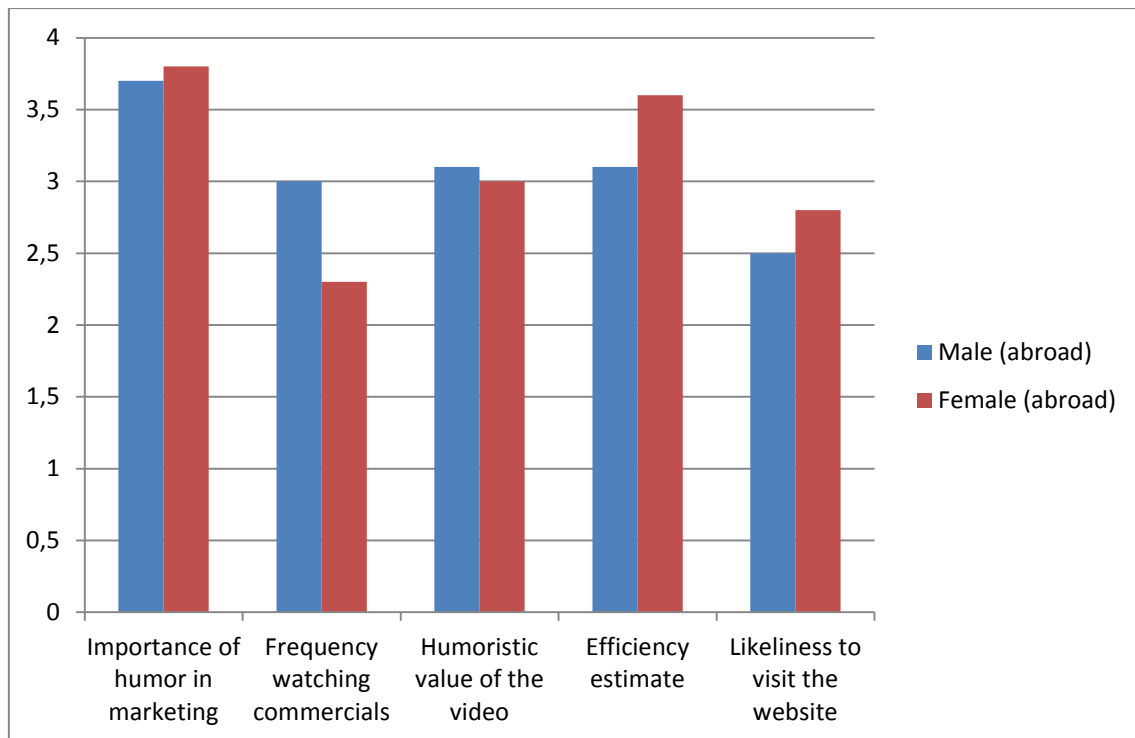
external humor from sources such as the internet. The findings of this graph may be inconclusive due to high variance of the quality in the respondents. Female respondents who knew the company gave much friendlier response to the advertisement than those who reported to not know the company. This may be the result of brand image increasing the perceived value of the commercial.

The video itself does not outline a specific product catalogue or the target, and seems to rely on prior knowledge of the company rather than attracting new customers. Without the prior knowledge of the video, the video was found to be nothing more than Terminator spoof to the audience, more or less confused of the purpose. Granted, the video was found from Varusteleka's official Youtube channel, in which Varusteleka's communication videos are being stored, thus the requirement for knowledge of the company is met since the customer needs the knowledge to gain access to the video. The target audience seemed to be strictly limited to customers who already knew of Varusteleka and most likely used in order to remind consumers of Varusteleka and to strengthen their brand image in Finnish markets. In fact, the difference between Finnish group and international group of students is notable. "Varusteleka" freely translated means "equipment hammer" and it seems to work in to such extent that it reveals enough information about the company in order to make conclusions of the company itself, even though if there was no prior knowledge of the company. For international students there was no chance to make such conclusion on their own due to limited knowledge of Finnish language. Above is a graph illustrating the differences between Finnish students from the questionnaire separated by gender excluding foreign groups.



GRAPH 3 Differences between Finnish male and female respondents

As we can see from the graph, there is no significant difference in Finnish group of respondents and the combined values received. The answers given in open ended questions reveal that Finnish respondents largely understood the message Varusteleka was trying to establish. Even without prior knowledge of the company the respondents could reply approximately what Varusteleka was offering. A number of respondents reported lower values for the effectiveness and humoristic value for the video as the international group of students. Above is a graph with foreign student's values.

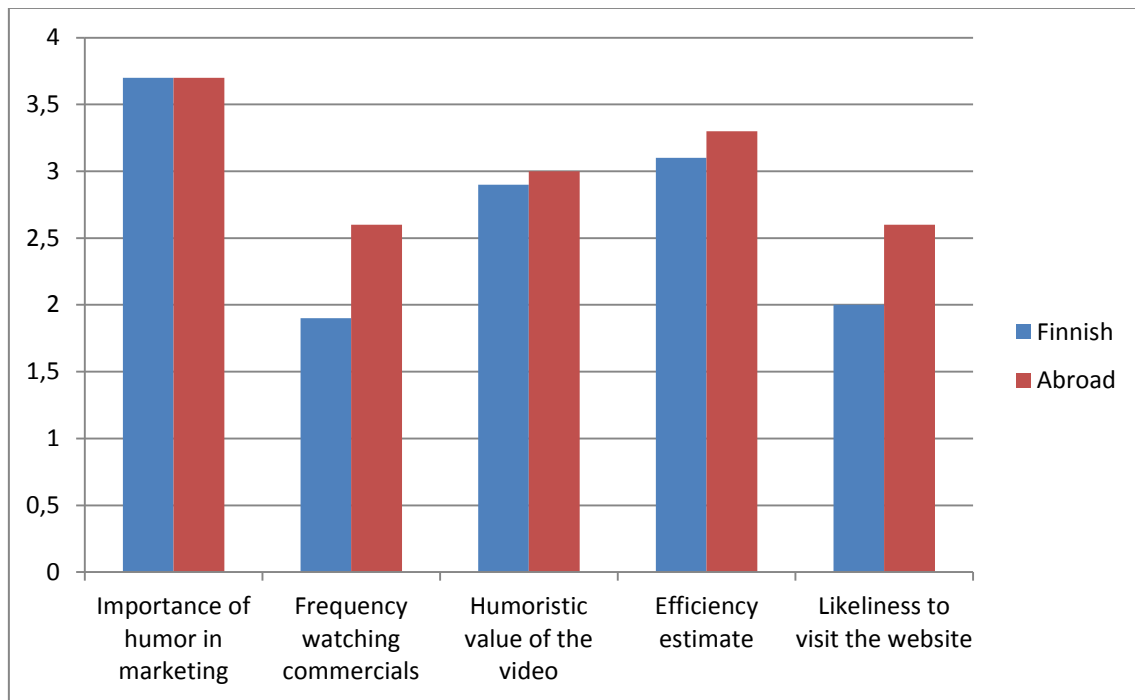


GRAPH 4 Differences between the answers of males and females abroad

It seems that the international group of students gave higher values to the video itself than the Finnish group, but failing to see what was being advertised. On the contrary to the results from Finnish group, the international group of female respondents seemed to recognize the video as more efficient mean of communication as females of the Finnish group. Overall the video received higher acceptance, without recognizing what was being advertised to them in general.

4.2 Cultural differences

Above a graph demonstrating the differences between the answers based on cultural differences.



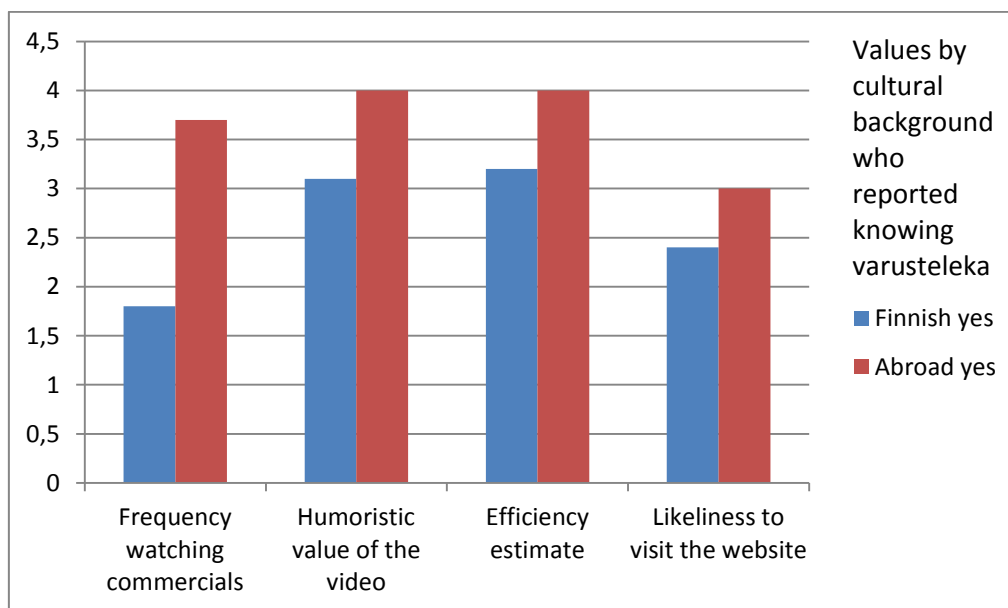
GRAPH 5 Cultural distinctions between the answers

According to the research data international students were more prone to watch commercials online than Finnish students. 93 per cent of international students reported that they have shared a funny commercial with their friends opposed to 70 per cent of the Finnish students. Both groups seemed to appreciate humor in marketing in similar fashion, but Finnish group of students were less likely to seek external humor and share it.

As suggested earlier humor requires willingness to receive humor for it to succeed, this may explain the slight fluctuation in the charts between the international group and Finnish group. The research suggests that the international students were more permissive to receive humor from external sources, thus increasing its effectiveness if communicated clearly. On the other hand the international group seemed to be much more unclear of the objective of the commercial as discussed earlier. Whereas the commercial receives

greater appreciation in international students, the commercial also suffers the consequence of miscommunication.

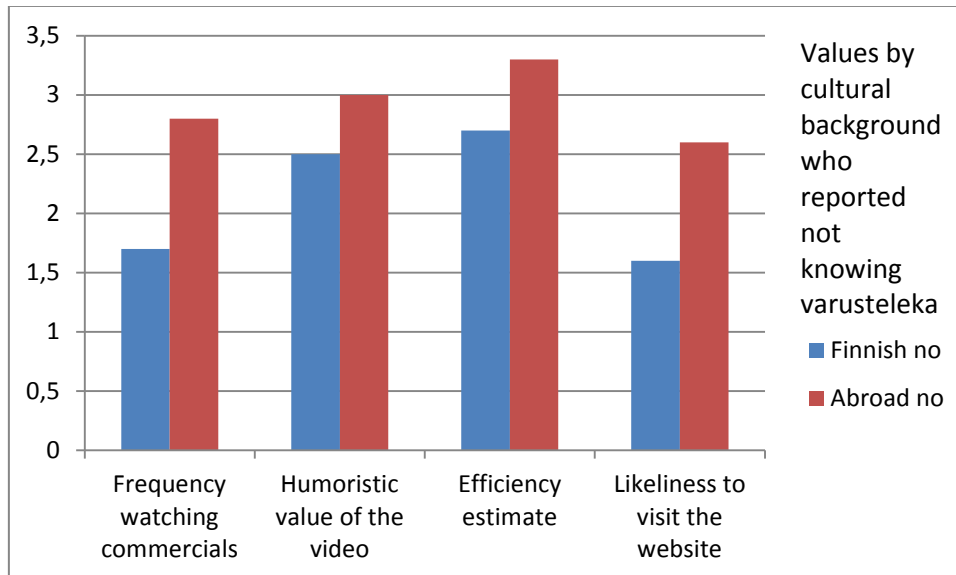
It may be wise to assume that the video was ultimately targeted only to communicate with Finnish customers. Even though the Finnish group seemed to give lower values for the video in total, but succeeded in communicating the principal message in greater degree than for the international students. This suggests that the humoristic portion of the advertisement was a success and with small tweaking could prove effective mean of communication internationally as well. Generally the video was well accepted in both groups. The following graph illustrates the difference between Finnish and foreign groups with prior knowledge of Varusteleka.



GRAPH 6 Differences between Finnish and foreign respondents with prior knowledge of Varusteleka

This graph represents the values given by the different cultural groups who responded to know the company beforehand the survey. The international group who knew the company beforehand was significantly smaller than the ones who did not know the company, but the ones who knew the company seemed to be much more open to external humor opposed to the Finnish group. Those who actively seek external humor from online seemed to appreciate the quality of humor more and were more willing to report higher values than those

who did not watch commercials online as frequently. The following graph illustrates the difference between Finnish and foreign groups without prior knowledge of Varusteleka.



GRAPH 7 Differences between Finnish and foreign respondents without prior knowledge of Varusteleka

As opposed to the previous graph these are the statistics where the respondents reported to not know the company beforehand. As the research may suggest the Finnish group of students were not as eager to seek external humor from the internet. Overall, the international group of students seemed to be more willing to report higher values on each note than the Finnish group of students.

4.3 Varusteleka analysis

The objective is to identify and understand how Varusteleka utilizes humor in their marketing communications, and how they have grown to be the most successful army retail store in Finland. The data is largely collected by browsing Varusteleka homepages and with past experiences dealing with Varusteleka.

The goal is to understand Varusteleka's ways of doing business and identifying how they implement humor in to their marketing communications. This chapter should work as a case example of a company, who has managed it

successfully. In 2010 Varusteleka achieved the leading position of military equipment retailer in EU. Varusteleka mainly operates in Finnish markets and is competing with five million people market compared to other similar retailers operating in Europe with much larger markets. Varusteleka's emphasis is on the quality of the products as well as clever usage of humor in their marketing communications. Varusteleka operates in Helsinki and they have their walk-in shop there. Varusteleka accepts international orders as well, but their main interest relies in Finnish markets (Varusteleka home pages).

This chapter focuses on analyzing how humor can be implemented with marketing mix paradigm. The chapter describes and speculates how humor can be influence in implied marketing mix. Product, place, promotion and people of marketing mix will be covered from Varusteleka's point of view. The more known fourth "P" of marketing mix; price is left out and replaced with generally known fifth "P"; people because pricing of the product can be hardly be tampered with the use of humor. The fifth "P"; people will generally focus on customer relations created via humor. It should be noted that this chapter is mainly author's speculation from theory to practice, since insufficient resources were collected. Appropriate references will be used whenever possible.

The first of many marketing mix tools is the firm's tangible offering to the market, the product. The category includes the product quality, design, features, branding and packaging (Kotler, 2003). All of the above creates the product characteristics of the company and effects in total customer value. Humor may be applied to the product features to increase the likelihood that consumers are willing to purchase the product, i.e. increase the perceived total customer value as discussed earlier. Perceived product quality may be affected in web sources by humor in form of product description.

The problem is that for e-retail the customer is not able to physically touch and handle the product. Thus it may be difficult to communicate the quality of the said product; this can increase the customer perceived risk in such purchase. The customers may hold on the purchase decision and go around checking different websites and brands alike before making decision. Humor has been

proven to be great stress reliever which may be solution to decrease the customer perceived risk by reducing anxiety, thus perceiving a lesser amount of risk. Humoristic references may also work as a bait to get the customer interested of the product category or the company itself, and keep the customer in the website longer periods at times. When customers show appreciation or interest towards the company positive word-of-mouth may more likely occur.

For example: let's assume that the company's product is high quality product. Humor could be implemented as in the description of the product in the website. Since e-retail based companies do not have a physical presence for the customer to come in and experience the product, the company needs to serve the customer with detailed product descriptions in order to succeed in the sale. Humor applied in the product description, as said, may decrease the perceived risk from the customer and generate genuine general interest from the consumers, potentially resulting in positive word-of-mouth or heightened brand image in the market.

To give a practical example: Varusteleka promoted their fur hats literally as "unethical", using wit and incongruity in their product description. The product itself was a price premium, ordinary fur hat; but with a bit of innovation and sense of humor the product became huge success and sold out in just a matter of couple of days. The product description was a marketing trick in order to clear the stock of the fur hats. Varusteleka is widely known in Finland for their use of wit and humor in their product descriptions.

The product was widely discussed, i.e. word-of-mouth worked as a great promotion tool for the product and Varusteleka's company image, therefore resulting in successful sales and brand recognition. The product does not exist in Varusteleka's product category anymore, but the product description still remains in the website for potential and existing customers to discover and laugh at.

Weblink:

(<http://www.varusteleka.com/en/product/turkishattu-janiksesta-epaeettinen/11125/> Weblink checked: 27.11.2013)

The second “P”: place refers to the distribution channels of the goods. Distribution channels are the channels in which the product travels through, ultimately reaching the point where customers can purchase the product. In e-retail the product may leave the factory where it has been produced to e-retailer who is to sell the product to the final customer. In this case, the distribution channels would be in its simplest form. Humor may be applied accordingly to the ultimate destination of the product, i.e. where the customers may purchase the product. The e-retailer who wishes to implement humor in to their distribution channels should consider the layout and color scheme of their web pages. The company should conduct research of the customer tastes and trends before moving onto implementing humor in any manner to avoid misinterpretation or confusion. The company could for example create banners of their own with humoristic references and use them either in their own web pages or in general on the web. The appearance of the web pages may be vital for the companies in order to be as appealing as possible for its customers. Nevertheless innovative ways of implementing humor in the appearance may work in favor of gathering interest among its customers, thus improving sales and recognition.

In order for humor to function as a proper differentiation mechanic for the company, humor truly should revolve around the company and not just in marketing communications. Marketing communications play vital role in promoting the business, but should be an extension of the humoristic approach of the company rather than the mean of it. Humor applied in promotion should convey the message “Hey we are here, we are funny! Check us out!” at the same time as they are conveying their message appropriately. If consumers get interested they may go and see the company’s websites and discover the humoristic value of the company, thus resulting in heightened brand image and recognition. In e-retail business like Varusteleka there are many people in the staff who write the product descriptions for the website. Even though the style how a person writes the product description might be different there usually is humor involved. This might suggest that Varusteleka intentionally promotes and hire their staff with sense of humor in order to encourage the humoristic atmosphere around the business operations.

In a service situation humor may be applied to work as a distraction mechanism. Humor may be used to force the attention elsewhere rather than the product or service, which prevents the customer paying close attention to the characteristics of the product or service. If the attention is maintained it is highly likely that the customer incorporates the pleasantness of humor in to the product or service itself, thus reducing their perceptual defenses.

For example in a scenario where service personnel is selling an intangible product such as health insurance; the customer most likely pays most attention to the characteristics of the person who is serving him or her rather than the service itself. They will judge the person by his or her looks, behavior and first impression. All this information may affect the overall appearance of the service in question, thus likely increasing the perceived total value of the service. The attention needs to be shifted from the product or service in order to reduce the perceptual defenses the customer has prior to moving in to making purchase decision. The service situation is most likely face-to-face situation where the service personnel is attempting to create most perceived total value image of the service via different means of marketing communication. In Varusteleka's case humoristic product descriptions could be a way distracting the customers from the product in the website.

4.4 Findings

According to the research data the advertisement may be ill-suited to foreign markets. It seems that foreigners would rank the advertisement on higher level, but at cost of misinterpreting their message. Most of the Finnish respondents reported to understand the core phenomenon behind the advertisement without having prior knowledge of the company. This may due the name of the company giving out vital information about their business operations. It should be noted, that the video in question was not meant to be aired on television, but solely in Varusteleka's communication channels. It is a pre-requisite to have some degree of knowledge of the company before getting access to the video.

Many of the respondents acknowledged the core target audience as restricting or binding argument. A number of female respondents reported not belonging to the video's target audience, thus declining the overall effectiveness of the communication video. The video was not solely targeted to male audience, but a number of respondents felt left out from the target audience. In addition, the video posing a man from the movie "Terminator" in a parodical manner resulted in a number of respondents claiming copyright infringements, where the respondents failed to see the parody and intention for humor.

According to the statistics the video would have been a failure outside Finland. Several foreign respondents failed to see what was being advertised in the video and even misunderstood the message altogether, whereas the video received more popular acceptance but failed to communicate its message. It should be noted, that if targeted to foreign markets a lot of could have been done otherwise to ensure the success of the video. It seems that Finnish humor according to this research could work effectively abroad as well; overall foreigners reported higher ratings for the video than Finnish students did. If the video is modified accordingly in order to ensure that the video communicates properly its purpose to the foreign group it could prove a very effective mean of communication with foreign countries. Of course any crucial information about the culture specific differences should be taken into account. As earlier mentioned, due to the small capacity of the research the findings may be inconclusive. The data represented is shown in order to demonstrate how theory outlined before may be implemented in practice. Further research opportunities and improvements will be discussed in discussions chapter at the end of this research.

The beauty of humor in advertising may be that once it has been successfully established and recognized promotion may come automatically via positive word-of-mouth. It is essential for companies to recognize and understand their target audience. Different segments can be very different from each other, even in the same host country. The company has to invest a lot of their resources in order to research their target audience; when humor is meant to be implemented there is even stronger emphasis on preliminary research. The

companies need to know multitude of characteristics of the segment group they are communicating with. Humor applied makes marketing communications even more complex, this is why it is probably wise to say humor in marketing communications may be high risk, high return investment with all the positive aspects humor may derive for the company if applied correctly.

Varusteleka may want to attach a brand figure to help recognize the company more easily. For example Varusteleka could launch a marketing campaign with intention to attach a “spokesman” to their already existing brand image. The spokesman can be anything of sorts, it should be something that is easy to remember and easily identifiable to the company. For example Varusteleka could choose Bill, the lazy soldier. Bill would appear in their advertising campaigns and their websites. When Bill has been established successfully the brand figure of Varusteleka, just seeing Bill the lazy soldier would remind the consumer of Varusteleka. Bill the lazy soldier would work much like a brand logo but with various additional marketing communication benefits, such as earlier mentioned brand parodies, internet memes and word-of-mouth.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This research has attempted to briefly touch a wide array of aspects in humor as a marketing communications tool. In an attempt to create guide-book like research work for those who are interested in using humor as their marketing communications strategy. This research should be adequate in terms of getting started. The idea of this research was not to deliver information directly for companies in order to start using humor as a marketing communications tool, but to introduce the concept of humor as a marketing strategy and demonstrate the potential of humor. This will hopefully attract new, innovative ways for companies to market themselves, and share further knowledge around the subject.

Earlier in this research the following research questions has been posed:

1. What affect the impact of humor
2. What are the major benefits for using humor as company's marketing communications

A number of aspects affect the impact of humor, such as; delivery of the joke, target group and its size, cultural differences, past experiences, intelligence, the joker, situation, context, appreciation towards humor. All of the above share equal level of importance when constructing humor, if any of the above is disregarded the outcome of the humor may diminish.

So far we have concluded that humor is highly context-specific, if the target audience of the joke is unknown it is impossible to evaluate the outcome of the joke. If the characteristics of the audience is ignored the humor may result in undesired outcome. Additionally past experience may have an impact on the quality of the humor whereas the object of the joke may derive past experience in to the present, resulting in higher level of willingness to receive humor, thus perceiving higher level of humor.

According to this research major benefits of humor are as follows; potential for stronger brand identity and recognition, Word-of-Mouth, greater customer involvement with the company(e.g. feelings of solidarity) as well as improved credibility, lowered consumer perceived risk, enhanced work performance and satisfaction, differentiation and innovation, leverage against competitors(brand parodies), and increased total customer value.

The graphs and evaluation should only be used in demonstrating and sharing ideas about the points made in the case analysis. Furthermore, the data represented may be used as preliminary research data for future projects whereas the preliminary data may work as estimate of the trend towards humor.

According to this research humor has a lot of potential in marketing communications with very few restrictions on it. It should be carefully noted that how the humor is implemented as well as the quality of the humor affect the outcome of the marketing strategy. Generally it takes a sense of humor to know humor, but humor also can be studied. When all the precautions are matched before the delivery of the humor, the outcome should be positive. In short, humor may be utilized as marketing communications tool as well as job performance enhancer, both of which may walk hand-in-hand when humor is used as a legitimate strategy within the company. I.e. The company could enjoy the benefits of humor enhancing their business environment even if the humor is solely applied to marketing communications.

Given the nature of this research work, most of participants with this work had experienced the “implication of humor” when the work was discussed. The participants seemed cheery and receptive to humor only by hearing the name of this research work, even though the research is carried out in a professional manner; the implication of humor had caused the participants to become more active to receive humor even though humor does not play a role in the written research work at all. During discussing the work, humor or humoristic references implemented seemed to have bigger impact to the participant than it would normally have in similar serious situation. The implication of humor

affected the participants in such manner, that it caused them to be more receptive to humor.

Once humoristic intention or humor has been introduced to the object the value of the humor that has impacted them before, depending how big was the impact of the humor, may work as a founding block for future reference. For example: the object experienced a hilarious joke during his or her last visit and decides to visit the company again. The object has created first impression and expectations for the company; in this case humor. The object now has the implication of humor, which may cause the object to experience more value for humor than it actually is, thus ultimately perceiving the company as more preferable than it actually was. Moreover, the company may enjoy the benefits granted by this phenomenon.

The results of the survey conducted may have diminished effectiveness due to small sample size. Further research opportunities may be to conduct similar survey to a bigger database in order to reinforce the findings made in this research. Additionally, one could consider viewing humor in person's behavioral pattern with humor such as: how does a person respond to humor and could there be correlation between personalities and receptiveness to humor. It has been pleasure working on this research project for Oulu University of Applied Sciences. Making this research project has taught me the importance of organization skills, motivation, perseverance and the ability to seek help from others. Special thanks to my supervisor Helena Ahola and Eeva-Liisa Oikarinen from Oulu University.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX 1

Male [] Female []

Home country: _____

How important is humor in company's marketing communications?

Not at all

Very important

1 2 3 4 5

Have you ever shared a funny commercial with your friends?

No

Yes

How often do you watch funny commercials online?

0 times/month

5 times/month

10+ times/month

1 2 3 4 5

Evaluate the humoristic value of the commercial on a scale 1 to 5:

Not funny

Funny

1 2 3 4 5

Evaluate the efficiency of the commercial on a scale 1 to 5:

Failure

Successful

1 2 3 4 5

How likely would you visit the company's website after seeing the commercial?

Definitely not

Definitely yes

1 2 3 4 5

What are the main points you can remember from the commercial and what was the company being advertised?

Company name:

Is there anything you would have done better or changed in the advertisement?

Have you heard of the company before: Yes [] No []